

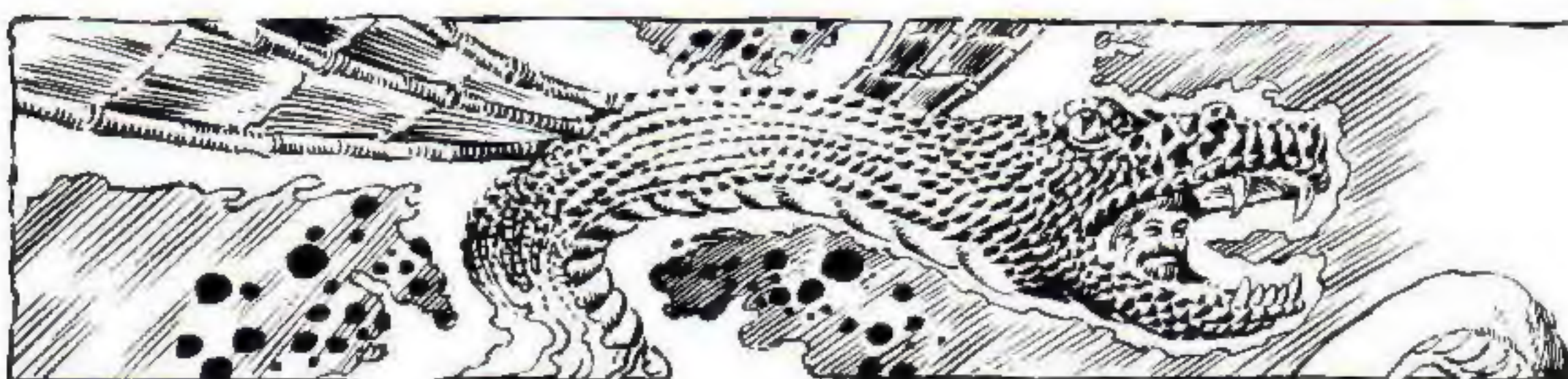
AZTEC X-CLIE

by MOENCH
HERNANDEZ
Redondo



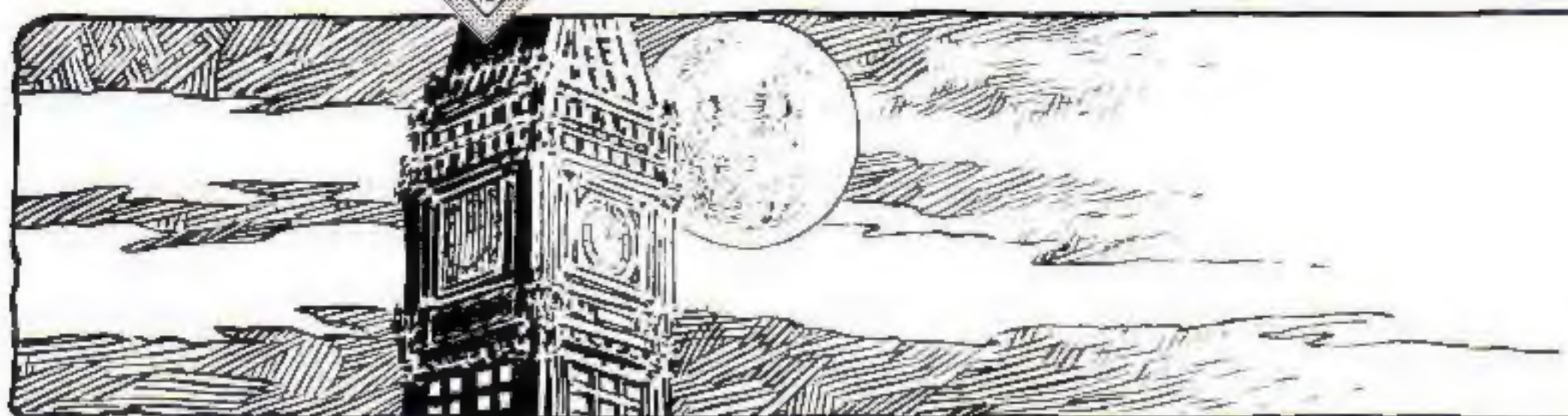
ONE MORE TIME:

THE SACRIFICIAL FEAST OF QUETZALCOATL BROKE UP AT DAWN, HAVING LASTED SOME THIRTEEN HOURS.



AZTEC ACE

LIGHTNING SNATCHED FROM THE TYRANT OF TIME



IN THAT HELLISHLY FESTIVE SPAN OF TIME, I HAD MET, FALLEN IN LOVE AND WORKED A SWEET SCAM WITH A GAMBLER CALLED BRIDGET KRONOPOLLOUS BACK IN SAN FRANCISCO IN 1940, PLAYING PHILIP MARLOWE FOR A WEEK.

I HAD ALSO BUSTED UP THE LARGENOUS PLANS OF AN EBONATI HOOD NAMED RINALDO, THEREBY PREVENTING HISTORY FROM COMING APART AT THE UNSTABLE SEAMS...

...NOT TO MENTION RECOVERING A PURLOINED SNAKE NAMED QUETZALCOATL, TO WHOSE BLOODTHIRSTY HEALTH I HAD JUST DRUNK.

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I HAD ALSO GONE TO A SAN DIEGO SUBWAY STATION IN 1996 TO COP A BAG OF FRITOS AND HAD EARLIER MADE SURE THAT BIG BEN'S VIRGIN CHIME WOULD STRIKE TRUE, FIXING TIME BETWEEN TWO KNUCKLEDUSTERS WITH SHADOW KNIGHTS.

I HAD WALKED FOG-LADEN STREETS, SAILED THE GOLDEN HELD, REPRIMANDING A FRELEPIAN HEAD FOR TWELVE ERRANT SECONDS, VISITED FIVE-WORLDS ON THE FLY, AND CHECKED IN ON BEN FRANKLIN UP IN PHILLY ON A STORMY NIGHT IN THE 18TH CENTURY.

NOW I PERCH IN A TREE, A FULLY CLOTHED ALAN ARKIN, LOOKING OUT AT THE DAWN OF TENOCHTITLAN, ISLAND CITY WHICH IS THE HEART OF THE ONE WORLD--AND WHERE A TIME-SCRAMBLED MAN OF THE 23RD CENTURY (NAMELY ME) HAS BECOME AN AGE AZTEC.



IT HAD BEEN QUITE A BASH, ALL RIGHT, BUT NOW IT'S OVER AND I AM DECIDEDLY BUSHED.

MOREOVER, I NEED A REWARD.



SO I DECIDE
THAT ONCE IS
NOT ENOUGH--

--AND CUT THROUGH
PUNGENT MARSHLAND
TOWARD HOME AND
GARAGE ...

...OTHERWISE
KNOWN AS MY
ICPAC TLA-
MANI PYRAMIDS.

"THAT'LL BE THE DAY"
BUBBLES IN THE BACK OF
MY BRAIN AS I ENTER
THE ONE ON THE RIGHT...

BUT THERE IS NO REWARD
THIS TIME.

INSTEAD WITH A BITTER GRIN
OLD BEN PULLS A FARBEAM PISTOL.

BUT I'D JUST LEFT HIM
200 YEARS LATER... AND
BRIDGET IS GONE.



BRIDGET--?

TIME TO SUCK IT UP AGAINST A BRACED
SPINE, 'CAUSE HERE WE GO AGAIN ...

IT HAS TAKEN US
A WHILE TO FIND YOU,
GAZA, SWEETENING THIS
MOMENT ALL THE MORE...

WHERE
ARE
BRIDGET
AND
HEAD,
EBONATI?

AND WHY
HAVE YOU
MURDERED
TOLANDA AND
ZYANYA?

I BELIEVE THE
ITEM IN MY HAND
ENTITLES ME TO THE
Q PHASE OF THIS
INTERROGATION--
WHILE YOU CONFINE
YOURSELF TO THE
A'S, HM?
NOW, HAND ME A
TOWEL AND TELL ME
WHERE YOUR
SHIFT-VEHICLE IS--
YOUR AZURE CROSS-
TIME EXPRESS. I
BELIEVE YOU CALL IT?

IF HE DIDN'T KNOW
WHERE THE A.C.E.
WAS, THERE WAS
STILL A CHANCE
BRIDGET AND HEAD
TOOK BREATH, GIVING
ME ALL THE BALLS
I NEEDED...

GO TO
THE BIG
BANG AND
SIT ON
IT,
EBONATI.

SOME CRICKET-THRUMMED NIGHT IN THE LATE 50'S I'D HAVE TO VISIT LUBBOCK--BUT RIGHT NOW THE MUSIC WAS SPLATTERED BY A SYNARSE-TRAIN OF FEAR AND FRANTICALLY FUMBLING OPTIONS.

DO YOU REALLY EXIST SOLELY TO SPIT IN THE EYE OF OVERWHELMING ODDS?

VERY WELL, MY DEFIANT OPPONENT-- OUT OF THE PYRAMID.

MOVE.

THE EBONATI DOPPELGÄNGER DIRECTED ME THROUGH THE WASTED CITY TOWARD DESTINATION UNKNOWN.

A GOOD THING ALL THE NATIVE-TWIGS WERE EITHER TOO DROGGY TO SEE OR TOO PRUNK TO BELIEVE THEIR EYES...

KEEP GOING, CAZA-- WE HAVE QUITE A JOURNEY AHEAD OF US--

THE DE-MAGMIFIED CITY AT THE HEART OF FIVE-WORLDS

THERE'S NOT MUCH TIME.

WHEN CAN WE GO HOME?

YOU KNOW I CAN'T RETURN TO REAL TIME UNTIL I'VE SAVED IT, SHAKREEN.

BUT THIS... LIMBO--

--IS MY STRENGTH, MY REFUGE--

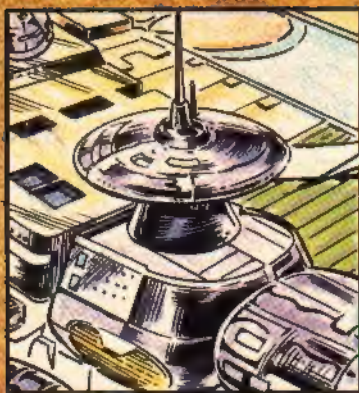
-- MY ONLY HOPE.

WHERE AND WHEN ELSE COULD I FIND THE FODDER FOR MY EBONATI NIGHTGAUNTS?

HOW ELSE COULD I FIND ENOUGH TIME TO DO WHAT MUST BE DONE?

BUT OUR CHILD--!

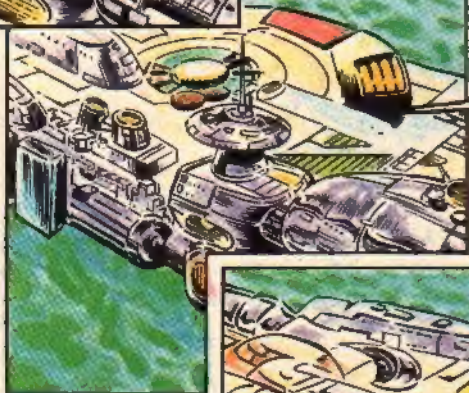
IF IT'S BORN HERE, IT WILL NEVER BE ABLE TO GO HOME...



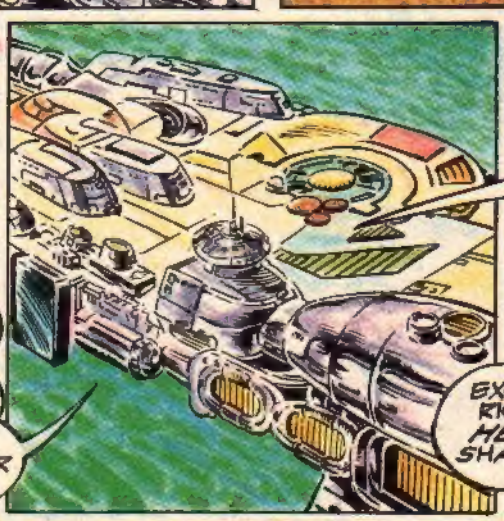
THAT IS
UNFORTUNATELY
TRUE,
SHAKREEN.

IF THE CHILD
IS BORN *HERE*,
IT WILL NEVER
HAVE *EXISTED*
IN OUR REAL-
TIME...

...BUT IF IT
IS BORN *HERE*,
THIS WILL BE
ITS HOME.



YOU CAN'T MEAN
IT! YOUR OWN CHILD!
WHAT KIND OF
FUTURE WOULD
IT HAVE--?



ALL OF IT--
AND ALL OF THE
PAST AS
WELL.

AS THE FIRST
EBONATI AGENT
TRAINED FROM
BIRTH--

ALL OF IT??
AYE, AND NONE OF
IT-- SAVE THE
MINUTES AND HOURS
COUNTED BY A
CLOCK WITH NO
FACE AND NO HANDS!

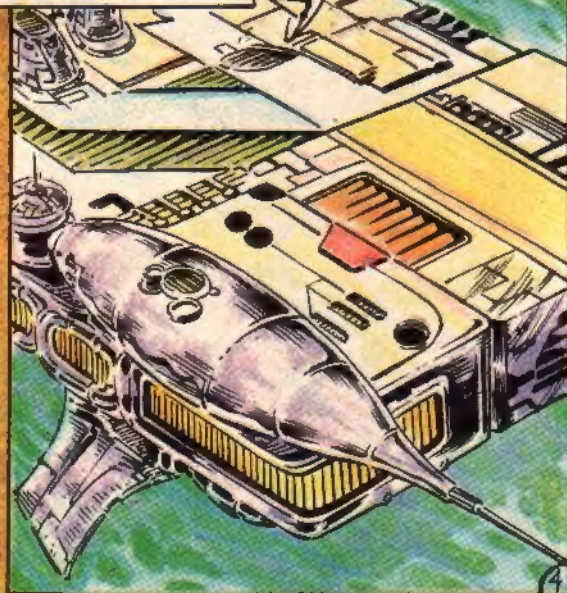
THE CHILD
WOULD BE CURSED
WITH THE
EXISTENCE OF A
SHADOW WHEREVER
AND WHENEVER
IT WENT...

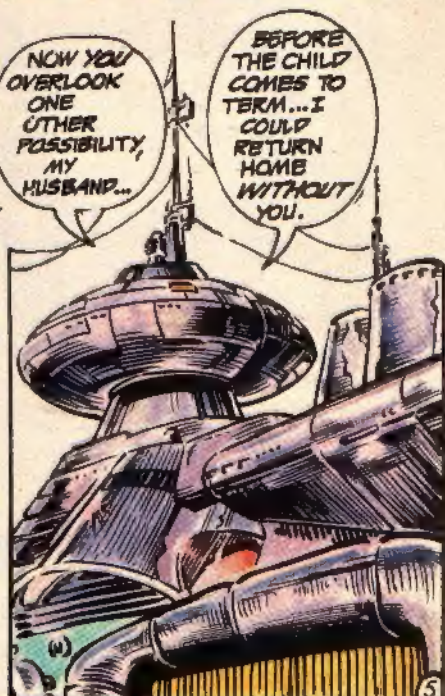
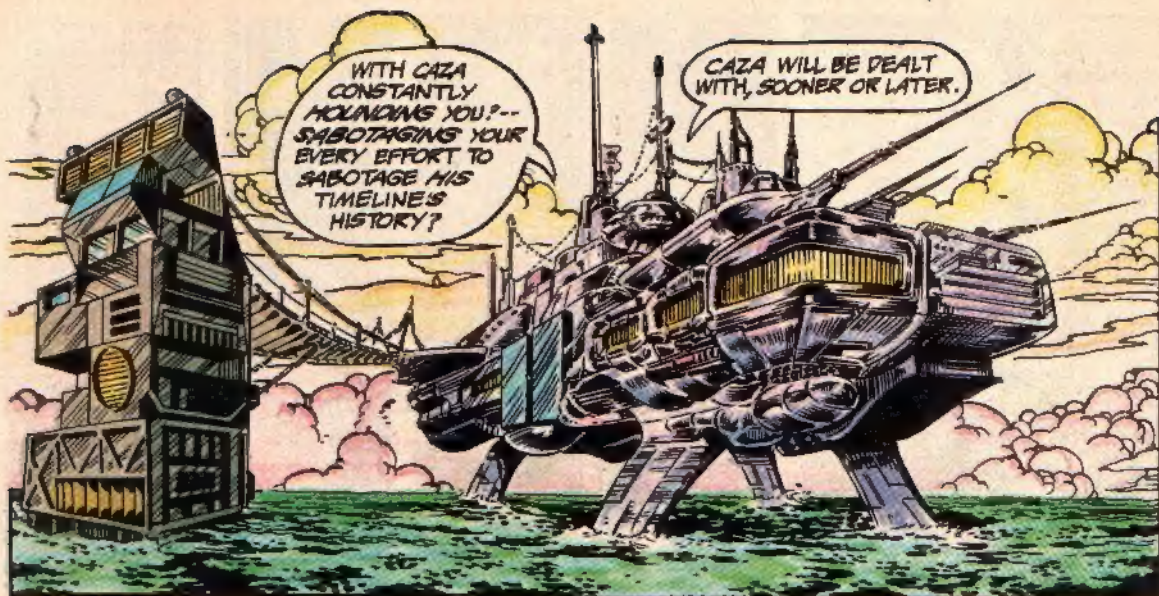
EXCEPT
RIGHT
HERE,
SHAKREEN.

"RIGHT HERE"--
IN LIMBO-- IN
NOWHERE AND
NOWHEN. I WON'T
STAND FOR IT!

YOU FORGET,
SHAKREEN--
THERE IS ONE
OTHER
POSSIBILITY...

I CAN SUCCEED...
BEFORE THE
BABY COMES TO
TERM.

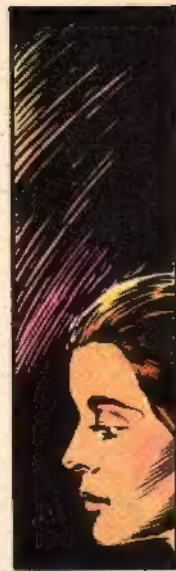






AND PERHAPS NEVER SEE ME AGAIN?

PERHAPS DIE--ALONG WITH OUR ENTIRE WORLD--BEFORE THE CHILD IS EVEN BORN?



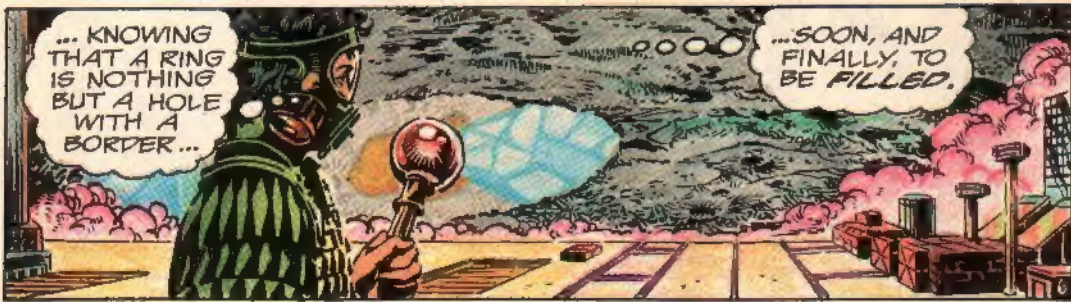
I THOUGHT NOT.



RINGED BY FIVE CONCENTRIC WORLD-LAYERS...

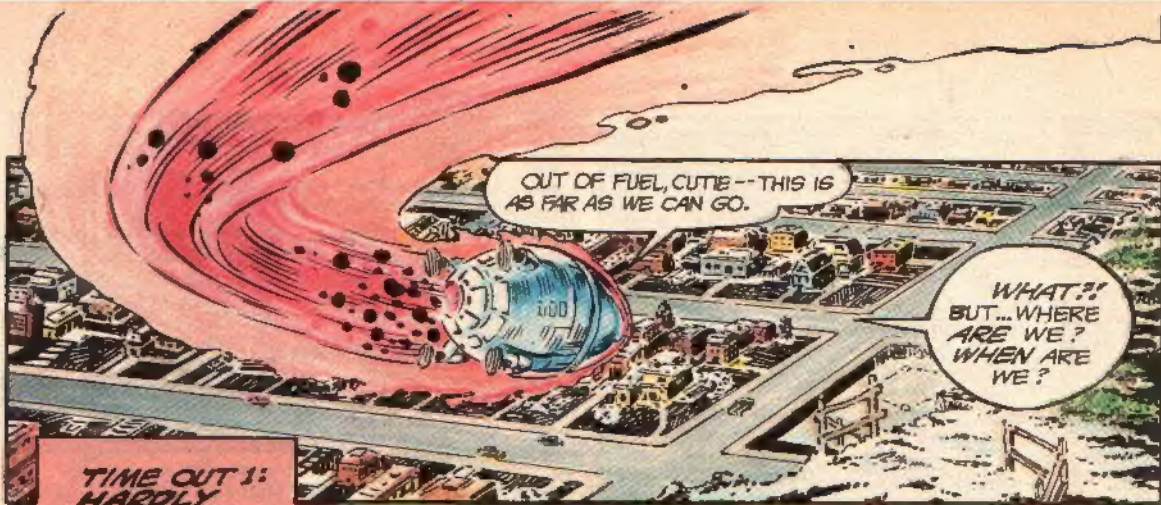
... EACH LAYER WITH HOLES FOR OCEANS ...

... AND HERE I STAND ON THE SEA OF THE CORE, "WAITING ...



... KNOWING THAT A RING IS NOTHING BUT A HOLE WITH A BORDER ...

... SOON, AND FINALLY, TO BE FILLED.



OUT OF FUEL, CUTIE--THIS IS AS FAR AS WE CAN GO.

WHAT?!!
BUT...WHERE ARE WE?
WHEN ARE WE?

TIME OUT 1:
HARDLY
LOVER'S
LANE



LOOKS LIKE KANSAS CITY,
23 FEBRUARY,
1955 ...



...A RELATIVELY PLACID IF
INCLEMENT
TIME AND PLACE
TO BE
STRANDED.

STRANDED?!!



ALL RIGHT, CALL IT MAROONED,
IF YOU PREFER,
BUT SEMANTICS
RARELY IMPINGE
ON REALITY...

...AND THE REALITY, GORGEOUS, IS THAT WE'RE
STUCK HERE--UNTIL WE PROCURE MORE
FUEL, ANYWAY.

OF ALL THE SHABBY, COCKEYED,
FANTAILED--

WHAT...IS THE
FUEL, HEAD?



HM?



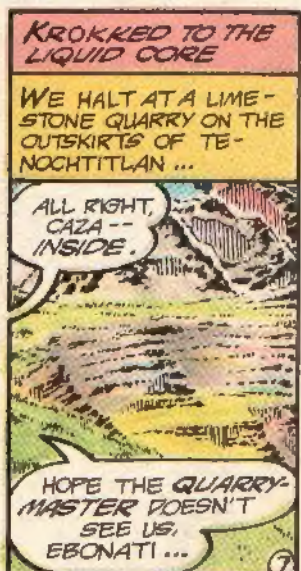
WHY,
IT'S--



--SLUG-
SLIME,
OF COURSE.

SLU-???

HOOOBOY.

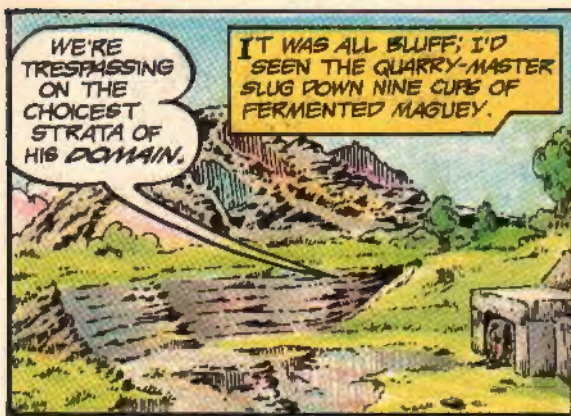


KROKked TO THE
LIQUID CORE

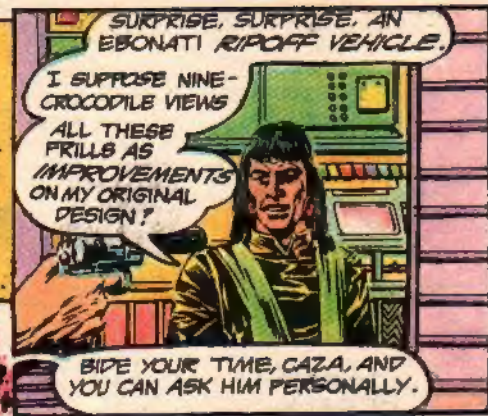
WE HALT AT A LIME-
STONE QUARRY ON THE
OUTSKIRTS OF TE-
NOCHTITLAN ...

ALL RIGHT,
CAZA--
INSIDE.

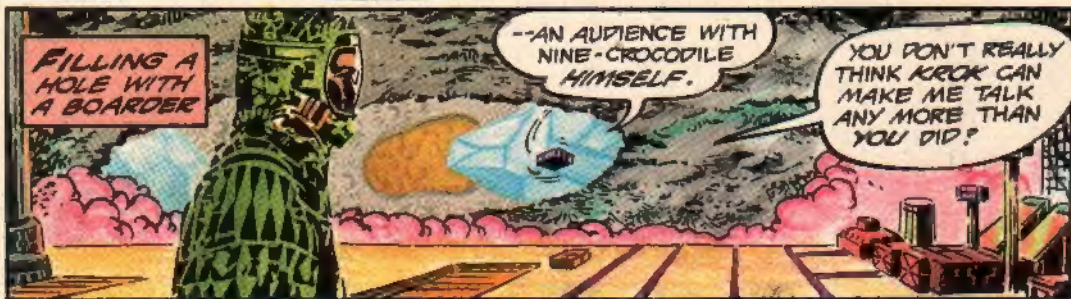
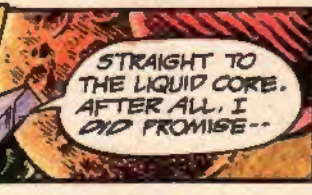
HOPE THE QUARRY-
MASTER DOESN'T
SEE US,
EBONATI ...



SO WE ENTERED THE STOREHOUSE AND ENDED UP ELSEWHERE...



I HATED THE EBONATI VEHICLE-- IT WAS SMOOTHER THAN THE A.C.E.



POOR BEN; WOULD HE NEVER GET TO FLY HIS KITE IN PEACE?

I WATCHED THE REVOLUTIONARY IMPOSTER DEPART, AND THE MUSIC WAS STILL SPLATTERED IN MY BRAIN--WITH NO VIABLE OPTIONS IN SIGHT...

DO YOU KNOW WHERE YOU ARE, CAZA...OR SHOULD I CALL YOU ACE?



YOU ARE FLYING THE LIQUID CORE OF FIVE CORRESPONDING IMPOSSIBILITIES ON MY CITY-SHIP! I AM KING HERE, ACE! I AM SUPREME IN THIS HEART OF CONCENTRIC PARADOX!



THIS PLACE IS NOWHERE AND NOWHEN, KROK--WHICH MAKES YOU NOTHING.

I AM THE INSTRUMENT OF YOUR INFINITE PAIN, CAZA! I AM THAT WHICH SHALL PRECLUDE YOUR ORIGIN!

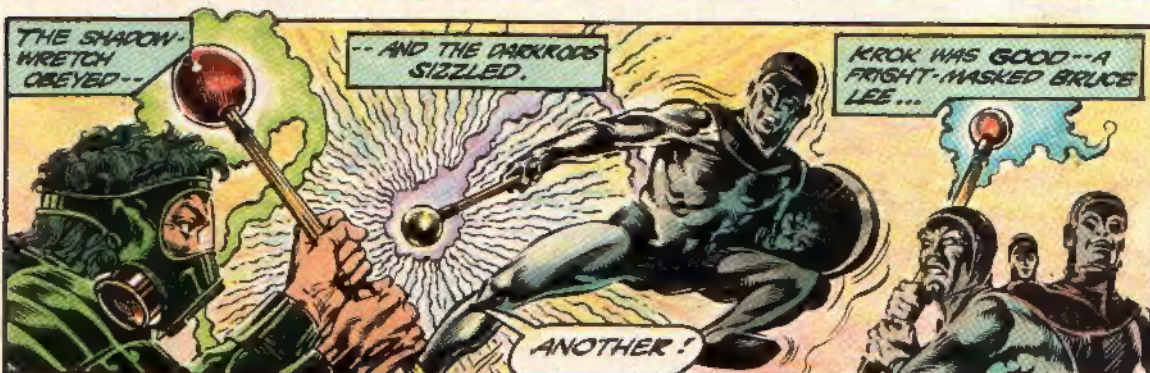


NIGHTS AUNT-- KILL ME!

THE SHADOW-WRETCH OBEYED--

-- AND THE DARKKRODS SIZZLED.

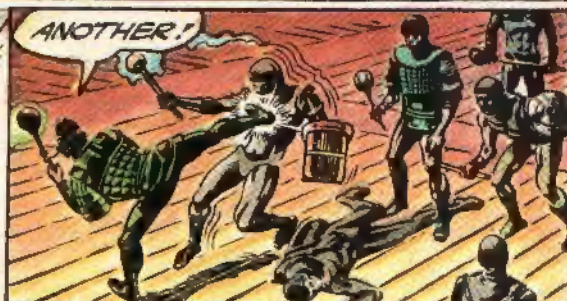
KROK WAS GOOD--A FRIGHT-MASKED BRUCE LEE...



ANOTHER!



ANOTHER!



ANOTHER!

HE WAS ALSO A VERY ANNOYING SHOW-OFF.



ANOTHER!!

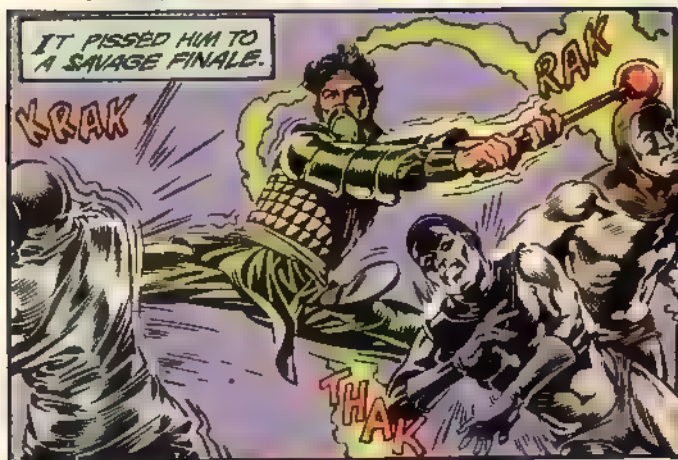


ALL THIS FOR MY BENEFIT...

I SHOULD HAVE BEEN FLATTERED AS WELL AS IMPRESSED... BUT I HAD A FEELING FIVE WAS HIS LIMIT.



YEP-- SCORCHED ARM-- AND THAT NEG-ENERGY BURNS LIKE ICE.



IT PISSED HIM TO A SAVAGE FINALE.



FIVE NIGHTGAUNTS ACE... FIVE OF THEM!

I STILL WASN'T IMPRESSED...



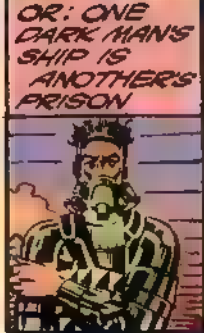
... SO I ACTIVATED MY WRIST-SCRAMBACK...



ONE-DARKS-MANSHIP



...AND PREPARED TO PROVE IT.



OR: ONE DARK MAN'S SHIP IS ANOTHER'S PRISON



A LITTLE ROOM, PLEASE?



TIME OUT 2: IT TAKES SLIME TO MAKE A HERO

--ACTUALLY A SYNTHETIC COMPOUND, BRIDIE-BABE, WHICH CAN BE MANUFACTURED ONLY IN THE FUTURE--EYE-EE, IN ACE'S NATIVE TIME--THE TIME HE FLED IN THIS VERY PROTOTYPE VEHICLE--



--AFTER CREATING THE PROTOTYPE AND THEREBY ATTRACTING THE MURDEROUS ATTENTION OF KROK AND HIS CRONIES FROM THE DIMENSION NEXT DOOR.

UH-HUH. SO WHY CAN'T WE GO BACK THERE--OR UP THERE--AND MAKE SOME MORE FUEL--

--OR AT LEAST STEAL SOME?

ACE KEEPS TALKING ABOUT IT. BUT SO FAR WE'VE WORKED UP THE NERVE ONLY ONCE. ACE'S LABS ARE FESTOONED WITH EBONATI TEMPORAL SENSORS AND ALARMS...



WE TRIGGERED THEM ON OUR ONLY ATTEMPT--JAWOHL, BARELY ESCAPING ALIVE, MY LITTLE TOMATO.

BESIDES, YOU'RE FORGETTING THE OBVIOUS...

LIND ZO, DISMISS DER PERDICAMENT--BUT THINGS COULD BE VERSE, ZINCE SLUG-SLIME IS ALMOST IDENTICAL TO THE FUEL-COMPOUND--UNSTABLE MOLECULES, YOU SEE

DER STUFF IS NORMALLY VISCOUS LIND MALLEABLE, BUT BECOMES HARDER THAN LUCITE UNDER THE RHYTHMIC RIPPLES OF DER SLUG'S CLEVERLY DESIGNED UNDERBELLY.

EVEN IF EITHER OF US HAD THE BALLS TO MAKE THE JUMP, HOW COULD WE WHEN WE'RE OUT OF FUEL?

OH, RIGHT.



ENABLES THE JELLACEOUS LITTLE BUGGERS TO TRAVERSE GRITTY SAND OR A GLITTERING RAZOR'S EDGE WITH EQUAL FACILITY--AND WE'VE BEEN FORCED TO RUN ON THE GOOP EVER SINCE THAT FIRST TANK OF ACTUAL FUEL RAN OUT.

THE DRAWBACK IS THAT IT LEAVES A CLEAR TRAIL THROUGH THE MELD--BUT THEN, NATURE IS ALWAYS PRETTIER...

KROK'S EBONATI CAN THUS FOLLOW US EASIER THAN WE CAN FOLLOW THEM--A DECIDED HANDICAP FOR ACE, MY SWEETIE PETUNIA, BUT THAT'S WHAT MAKES HEROES.

I'M NOT YOUR PETUNIA--AND I'M NOT A HERO.

OH, TUSH, TUSH, MY PEISTY FLOWERBELLE--SLIME'S EASY ENOUGH TO FIND, IF ONE KNOWS WHERE TO LOOK. USUALLY UNDER A SLUG. TOO BAD WE RAN OUT IN WINTER, THOUGH.

WHY DON'T YOU LUNKHEADS KEEP A SLUG-FARM RIGHT HERE ABOARD THE A.C.E.?

WE TRIED IT, BUT TRANSIT VIBRATIONAL FREQUENCY SOLIDIFIES THE WRETCHED CREATURES TO CEMENT-- WHICH MAY BE WHY THEIR SLIME IS EFFECTUAL IN THE FIRST PLACE.



ROOTIE-TOOTIE TO YOU TOO, HEAD-- AND NO WONDER YOU GOT THE GUILLOTINE.

TOUCHÉ, MY TORRID TAMALE.

NOW, SINCE *SOMEONE'S* GOT TO STAY HERE IN THE A.C.E., AND SINCE YOU'VE GOT A *BUILT-IN* BODY TO GO WITH YOUR HEAD, MY WHOLLY HOLISTIC WOMAN--



TEMPUS FLIGIT

--DO PUT ON YOUR FLIER'S CAP AND RUN ALONG IN QUEST OF SLUGGS, WILL YOU?

FAT, JUICY ONES PREFERRED-- AND JUST THINK OF IT, MY SAUCY LITTLE VIXEN--



TEMPUS FLIGIT

--AS THE QUAINT PRACTICE KNOWN AS A SCAVENGER HUNT.

GRRRRR...



WEE BEE BEE



"TOO BAD WE RAN OUT IN WINTER".

HOOOOOO...



BADTIMING THE BAD GUYS



THE CEREBRAL SONG WAS ABRUPTLY BURIED BY MENTAL FLASHES OF BRIDGET AND HEAD.

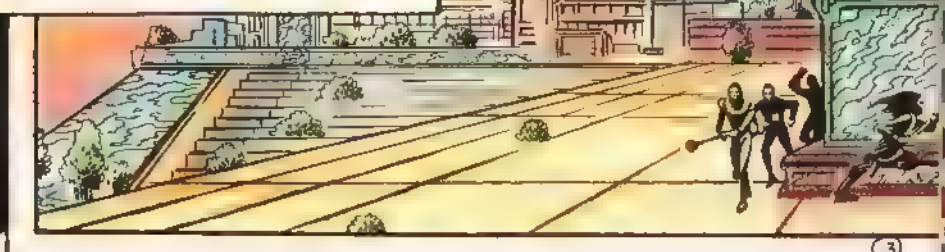
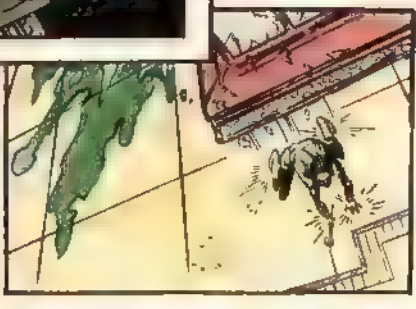
ESPECIALLY BRIDGET.

BUT SINCE KROK'S SHADOW-KNIGHTS AND NIGHT GAUNTS WERE STILL BENT ON BOLING ME DOWN FOR GLUE, FIRST THINGS FIRST...

LETTING THEM SEE ME MAX HAVE BEEN HARD ON THE KNEES, BUT LEADING A MERRY CHASE WAS NECESSARY TO GAIN TIME...

AND WITH THIS IN MIND, I CIRCLED BACK TOWARD THE QUEER BUILDING INTO WHICH I'D SEEN QUANN DISAPPEAR.

I'M SURE IT WAS JITTERS, BUT I COULDN'T SWORN THEY SAVED BEHIND ME.



ANYWAY, IT WORKED.

MAYBE I COULDN'T HEAR MUCH, BUT I SAW EVERYTHING DOWN THERE.

...MUST NOT REACH FRANCE, QUINN... LETTER FROM WASHINGTON... SABOTAGE... PRIVATEER... FRENCH AID... ENSURE THE AMERICANS WILL LOSE THE REVOLUTIONARY WAR... PHILADELPHIA HARBOR...

I WILL NOT FAIL... AND FRANKLIN WILL NOT SAIL.

MY MISSION, THEN: STOP THE DOPPELGÄNGER FROM INTERFERING IN AMERICA'S RELATIONS WITH FRANCE...

THE MISSION'S OBSTACLE: ESCAPING KROOK'S BIZARRE BACK YARD.

AND SINCE THE BEST WAY TO GET FROM HERE TO PHILLY HARBOUR IN SEPTEMBER OF 1776 WAS THE CROOKED LINE OF A SHIFT-VEHICLE--

I CONTINUED CIRCLING BACK, AND I'LL SAY THIS MUCH FOR THE SYNCHRONOUS CITY-SHIP-- IT'S BIGGER THAN NEW YORK AND THE BIG APPLE DOESN'T EVEN FLOAT.

SOME WOULD EVEN SAY IT'S SINKING.

TIME OUT 3: YES, WE AIN'T GOT NO SLUGANAS

YES? MAY I HEL--

HUH--?

UM... THAT IS... M-MAY I... UH... H-HELP YOU, MISS?

GOT ANY SLUGS?

S-SLUGS.

SLUGS.

AH... N-NO... GOLDFISH. BUT... AH... NO SLUGS.

SHIT.

TING LING

THANKS ANYWAY.

TWO-TIMING AS A PASTIME

OKAY, AS AN OPTIMIST: GETTING CLOSER TO THE EBNATI TIME-MACHINE WAS A PROCESS OF... INVIGORATION.

NOW A PESSIMIST: THE MACHINE WAS, OF COURSE, GUARDED BY DARKROODED HORDES.

AS BRIDGET WOULD SAY: HOOOOO... YOU'LL NEVER MAKE IT.

KNOW

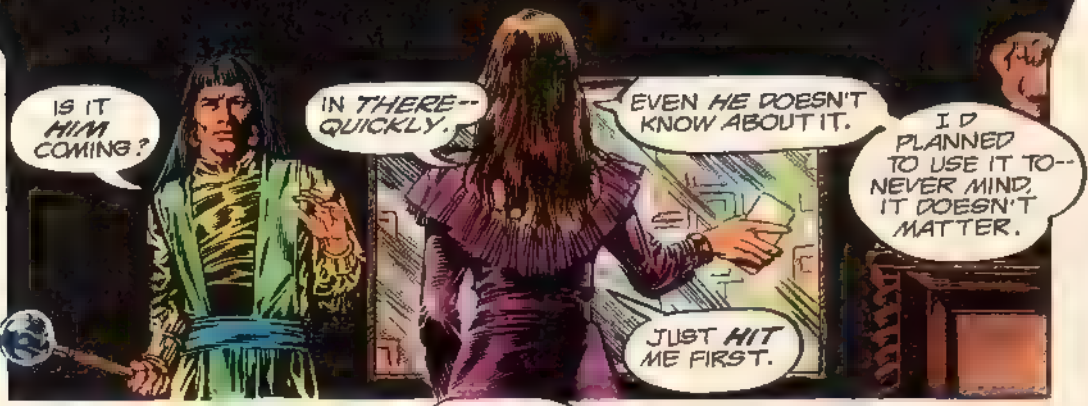
YOU--? YES... I'VE BEEN WATCHING FROM THE WINDOWS. WHEN THEY BROUGHT YOU IN, I SHOULD HAVE KNOWN-- IT WAS YOU.

THEN YOU'RE-- HIS WIFE. WE BOTH SHOULD HAVE KNOWN.

ENTER.

INSIDE, MY FACE DID ALL THE SPLUTTERING AND STAMMERING. YES... I'M WITH CHILD... MEANING WE SHALL NEVER KNOW. BUT--

I WAS CUT OFF BY FOOTSTEPS IN THE HALL...



IS IT HIM COMING?

IN THERE-- QUICKLY.

EVEN HE DOESN'T KNOW ABOUT IT.

I'D PLANNED TO USE IT TO-- NEVER MIND, IT DOESN'T MATTER.

JUST HIT ME FIRST.



NO--!

WITH THE DEAD END-- YOU MUST.

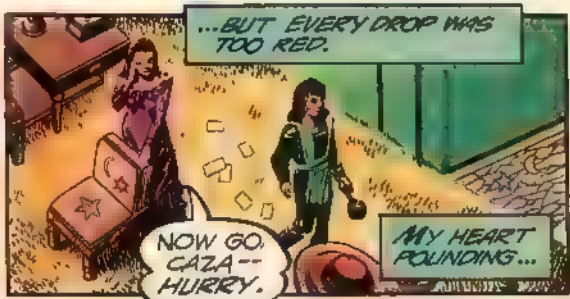
SHE WAS RIGHT-- BLOOD WAS VITAL.

WHERE KROK IS CONCERNED, IT IS EVER SO.



FWAK

I SPILLED AS LITTLE AS POSSIBLE...



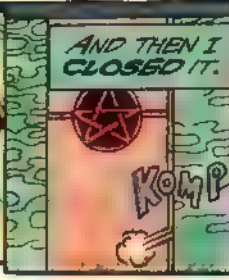
...BUT EVERY DROP WAS TOO RED.

NOW GO, CAZA-- HURRY.

MY HEART POUNDING...



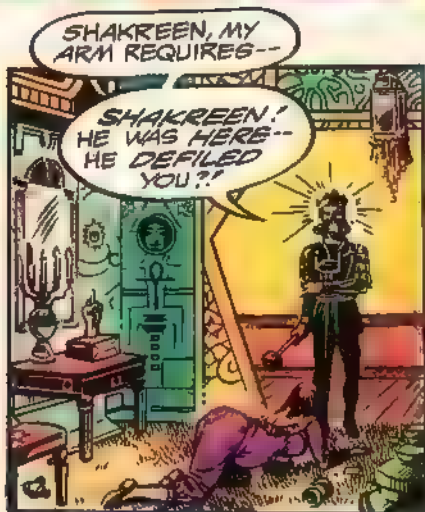
...I OPENED THE CLOSET DOOR.



AND THEN I CLOSED IT.

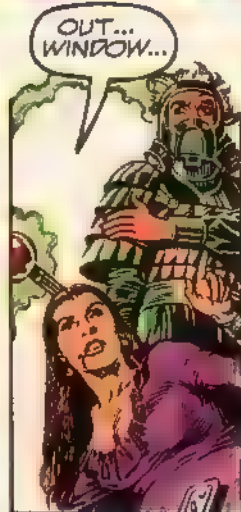


KEESH!



SHAKREEN, MY ARM REQUIRES--

SHAKREEN! HE WAS HERE-- HE DEFILED YOU?!



OUT... WINDOW...



THEN... THERE WILL BE... CONSEQUENCES.

SCRAMBLING BACK

HARDLY THE TYPICAL CLOSET IN WHICH ONE TAKES REFUGE FROM AN ANGRY HUSBAND. IT WAS INSTEAD A GIFT OF ESCAPE, GRANTED BY SOMEONE WHOM I'D ONCE --

NO! I REFUSED TO THINK ABOUT IT, ABOUT HER, ABOUT WHAT IT ALL MIGHT MEAN ...



AND YET, SHAKREEN HAD STASHED HER CLOSET WITH A PRIME VEHICLE, AND I WISHED NOW THAT I'D PRESSED HER ON ITS INTENDED USE ...

HIS POOR RICHARD'S ALMANAC ESTABLISHED HIM AS THE FIRST OF THE SELF-HELP GURUS.

HIS ELECTRICAL EXPERIMENTS, ALONG WITH THOSE OF THE ITALIAN VOLTA AND THE ENGLISHMAN PARADAY, PIONEERED THE WAY TO ELECTRICAL POWER.

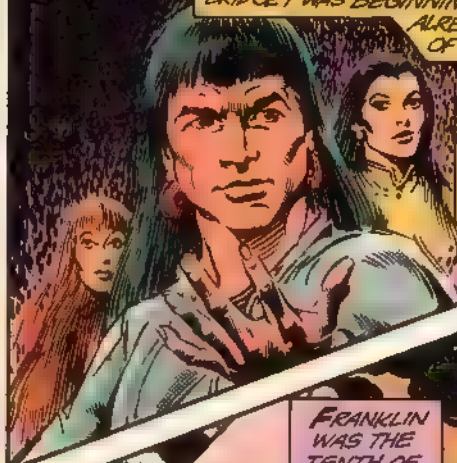
HIS OTHER CREDITS INCLUDED THE POSTAL SERVICE, LENDING LIBRARY, DICTIONARIES IN SCHOOLS, THE FIRE DEPARTMENT, BIFOCALS, THE FRANKLIN STOVE, LIGHTNING ROD, HOSPITALS, INSURANCE ... ON AND ON ...

OH HELL, THERE WAS NO ESCAPING IT.

BUT AGAIN, THE LESS I THOUGHT ABOUT IT, THE BETTER AND THE BUSINESS AT HAND. SINCE IT MIGHT BE DAYS BEFORE KROK WAS CONVINCED I WAS NO LONGER ON THE CITY-SHIP, I HAD TO ASSUME THE FRANKLIN ASSASSINATION ATTEMPT WOULD GO OFF AS SCHEDULED ...

... MEANING I HAD TO SHUT OUT ALL THOUGHTS OF TWO WOMEN -- THE NEW LIFE OF INFINITY BRIDGET WAS BEGINNING (IF SHE WEREN'T DEAD ALREADY), AND THE NEW LIFE OF FLESH THE OTHER CARRIED ...

TO HELP, I FILLED MY MIND WITH EVERYTHING HEAD AND I HAD REVIEWED ABOUT THE PIGEON AT HAND.



FRANKLIN WAS THE TENTH OF SEVENTEEN CHILDREN ...

... NOT TO MENTION HIS SUCCESSFUL DIPLOMATIC MISSION TO PARIS, INSPIRING A FRANKLIN CULT IN EUROPE AND RESULTING IN SUBSTANTIAL LOANS AS WELL AS 44,000 FRENCH SOLDIERS AND SAILORS ABETTING WASHINGTON'S PRESUMABLY DOOMED CAUSE.

NO DOUBT ABOUT IT: WITHOUT FRANKLIN, THE CRACKPOT NOTION OF LIBERTY WOULD HAVE BEEN DOOMED, SQUELCHED RIGHT IN THE CRADLE OF --

We the People...

I SURRENDERED TO THOUGHTS OF TWO WOMEN ...

TIME OUT 4: JAIL BARS DO NOT A ZOO MAKE

YOU GOT
ROCKS IN
YOUR HEAD,
LADY?

WHY?
NEED SOME
BALLAST
FOR YOUR
OWN EMPTY
NOGGIN?

LOOK, I AIN'T PAID TO
TRADE QUIPS WITH EVERY
FLAKY DAME OFF THE
STREET, SO TO ANSWER
YOUR QUESTION--NO,
THIS TOWN AIN'T
GOT A ZOO.

AND IF WE DID,
IT'D SURE AS HELL
BE CLOSED TODAY.

GROUCHY, AIN'TCHA?
FEEDING TIME MUST BE
LATE.

AHRRR!

DOXIE-GLITCH OFF THE STARBOARD BOW

MY DOUBLE-DISTAFF THOUGHTS
WERE IN THE SAME DEAD-END BY
THE TIME I DECIDED TO ARRIVE.

THANKS TO THE
WOMB FACTOR,
I COULDN'T KNOW
EXACTLY WHERE
I'D POPPED OUT
OF THE MELD...

BUT ONE THING WAS CERTAIN
IT WAS DARK AND WET OUT
THERE...

.. AND JUST IN CASE
I'D NEED TO BLAST
MY WAY OUT, I TOOK
AN EBONATI MAG-
CHARGE.

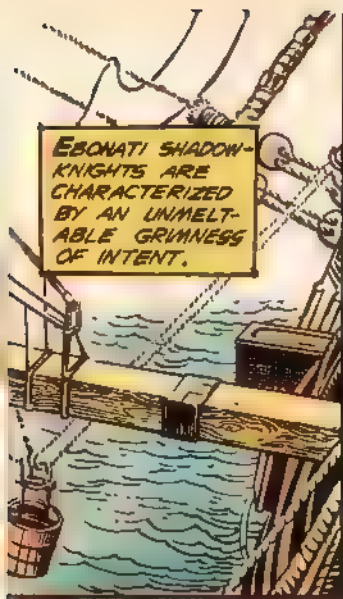
BOY SCOUT TRAINING PAYS OFF
ONCE AGAIN.

GIANTS' CLAMS WERE
HARDLY INDIGENOUS TO THE
ATLANTIC JUST OFF THE
MOUTH OF THE DELAWARE
RIVER, SO IT WAS CLEARLY
ANOTHER PARADOX-GLITCH
SPAWNED BY THE THREATENED
UNRAVELLING OF TIME...

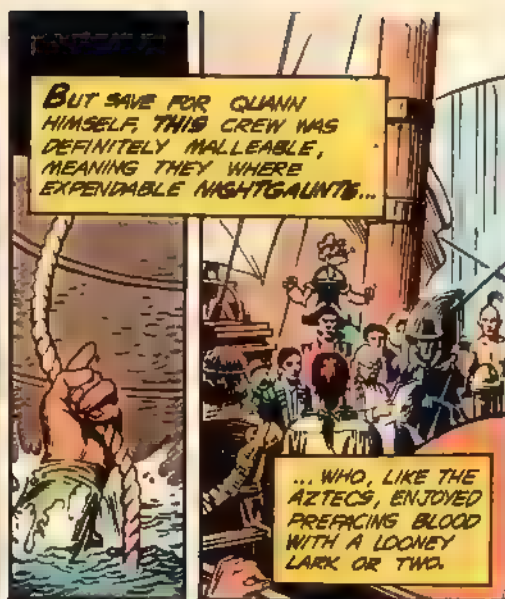
AND IF MY GUESS WAS
RIGHT, THESE HISTORIC
WATERS WOULD SOON BE
INFESTED WITH OTHER
MONSTERS OF SURREALITY.

THE PROUD THING
PLYING THE SURFACE
HAD TO BE EITHER THE
REAL FRANKLIN'S
SHIP BOUND FOR
FRANCE --

--OR AN EBONATI
SHIP, TRICKED UP
LIKE AN AMERI-
CAN PRIVATEER
PROWLING FOR
BRITISH WARSHIPS
BUT ACTUALLY
WAITING TO
POUNCE ON HAP-
LESS BEN HIM-
SELF.

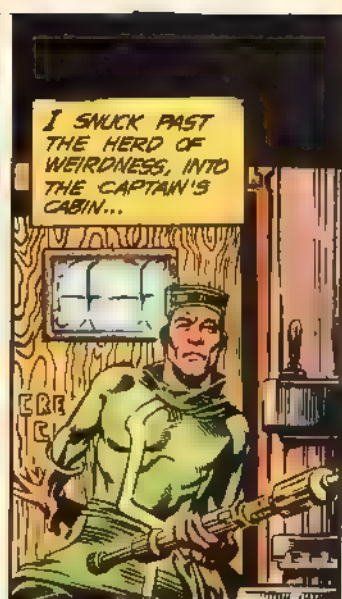


EBONATI SHADOW-KNIGHTS ARE CHARACTERIZED BY AN UNMELT-ABLE GRIMNESS OF INTENT.

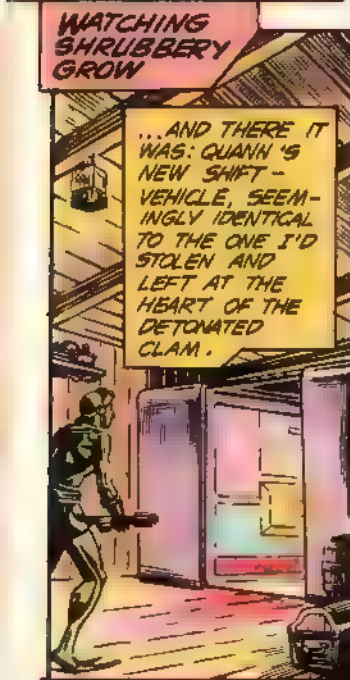


BUT SAVE FOR QUANN HIMSELF, THIS CREW WAS DEFINITELY MALLEABLE, MEANING THEY WERE EXPENDABLE NIGHTGAUNTS...

...WHO, LIKE THE AZTECS, ENJOYED PREFACING BLOOD WITH A LOONEY LARK OR TWO.



I SNUCK PAST THE HERD OF WEIRDNESS, INTO THE CAPTAIN'S CABIN...



WATCHING SHRUBBERY GROW

...AND THERE IT WAS: QUANN'S NEW SHIFT-VEHICLE, SEEMINGLY IDENTICAL TO THE ONE I'D STOLEN AND LEFT AT THE HEART OF THE DETONATED CLAM.

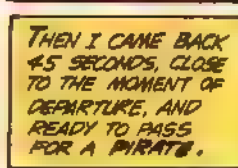


I STEPPED IN AND MADE IT GLOW AHEAD ONE MINUTE--

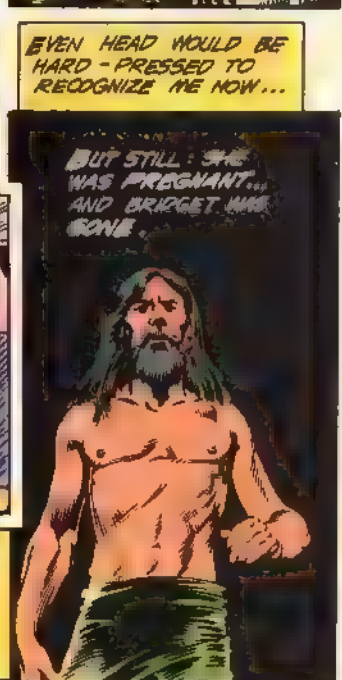
UREEB



--WHERE I REMAINED A MONTH, THINKING A LOT, PLAYING GAMES WITH THE COMPUTER, AND GAGGING ON THE PROCESSED FOOD.



THEN I CAME BACK 45 SECONDS, CLOSE TO THE MOMENT OF DEPARTURE, AND READY TO PASS FOR A PIRATE.

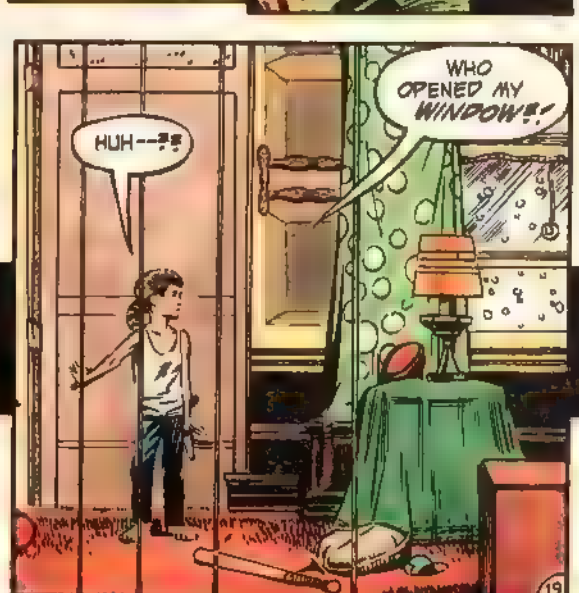


EVEN HEAD WOULD BE HARD - PRESSED TO RECOGNIZE ME NOW...

BUT STILL: SHE WAS PREGNANT... AND BRIDGET WAS GONE.



DA-VY, DA-VY CROCK-ETT, KING OF THE WILD FRON--



HUH--??

WHO OPENED MY WINDOW?!

UH... HINA, KID-- AFRAID I SORTA DENTED YOUR DRAIN-PIPE ON THE WAY UP.

NICE TERRARIUM YOU GOT HERE--MIND IF I BORROW A SLUG?

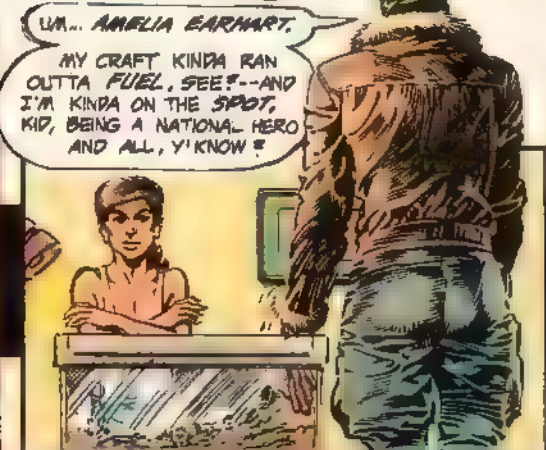
A woman with short blonde hair, wearing a light-colored jacket and pants, stands in a room. In the background, there is a large terrarium with a lizard inside. A small airplane is visible in the sky above the room.

WHO THE BEESWAX ARE YOU, LADY?

A close-up of a man's face. He has dark hair and is looking slightly to the side with a questioning expression.

UM... AMELIA EARHART.

MY CRAFT KINDA RAN OUTTA FUEL, SEE?--AND I'M KINDA ON THE SPOT, KID, BEING A NATIONAL HERO AND ALL, Y'KNOW?

Amelia Earhart, wearing a flight suit and goggles, stands with her back to the camera, talking to a man who is standing behind a counter. The man is looking at her.

NOW ABOUT THIS SLUG...?

A large, green, slug-like creature is shown in a rocky, outdoor environment. It has a long, thin neck and a small head.

IF YOU COULD SEE YOUR WAY CLEAR TO--

A green slug-like creature is shown in a rocky, outdoor environment. It has a long, thin neck and a small head.

OWW!!

LOUSY LIZARD BIT ME!

Amelia Earhart is shown in a dynamic pose, being bitten on the arm by a green lizard. She has a pained expression. The background is a bright, orange-yellow sky.

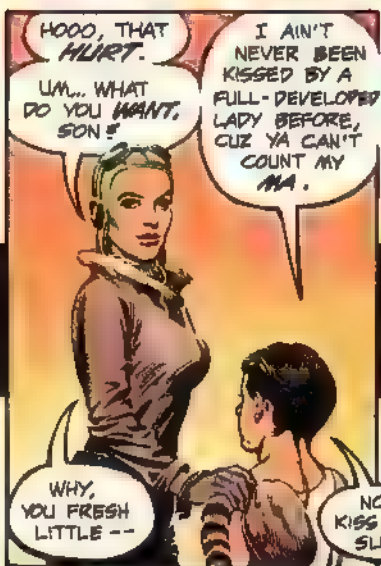
HE DON'T LIKE STEALERS, LADY--SO WHAT 'LL YA GIMME FOR HERKIMER THE SLUG?

A green slug-like creature is lying on a table. In the background, there is a car and some other objects.

HOOD, THAT HURT.

UM... WHAT DO YOU WANT, SON?

WHY, YOU FRESH LITTLE --

Amelia Earhart is shown in profile, talking to a man. She is wearing a dark jacket. The man is looking at her.

I AIN'T NEVER BEEN KISSED BY A FULL-DEVELOPED LADY BEFORE, CUZ YA CAN'T COUNT MY MA.

I OUGHTTA SLUG YOU, YOU LITTLE--

I MEAN, OF COURSE--IT WOULD BE AN HONOR TO TOUCH LIPS WITH A YOUNG GENTLEMAN LIKE YOU.

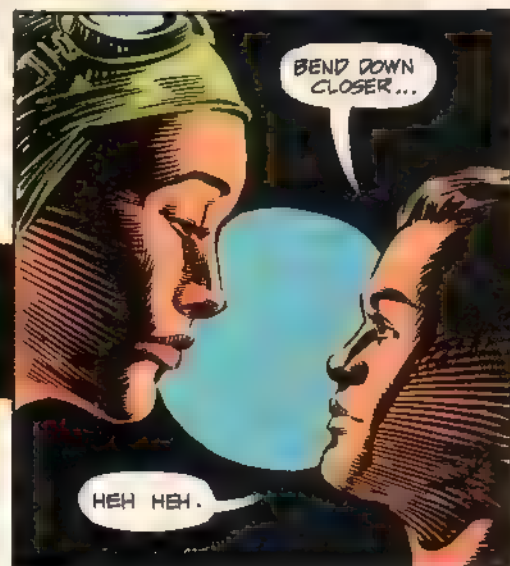
NO KISS, NO SLUG.

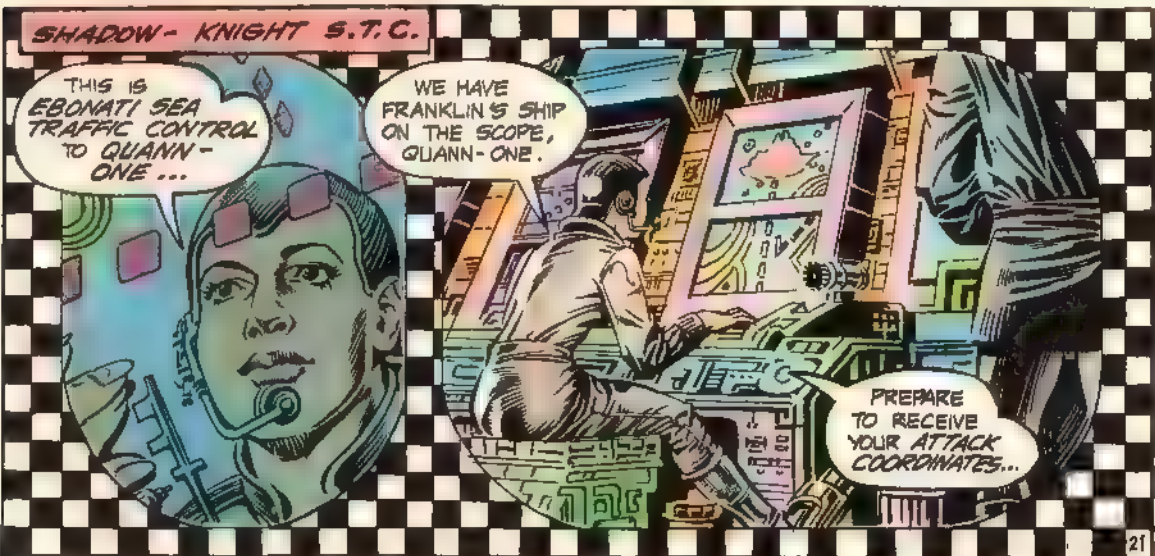
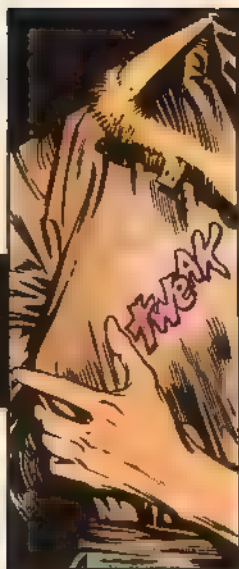
YOU BETTER BELIEVE IT, LADY.

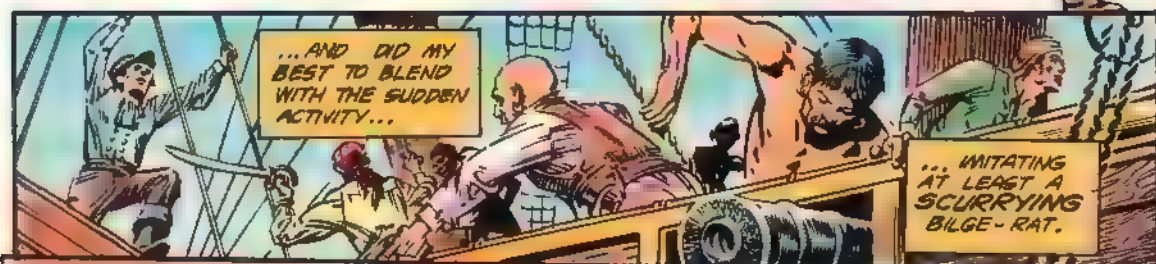
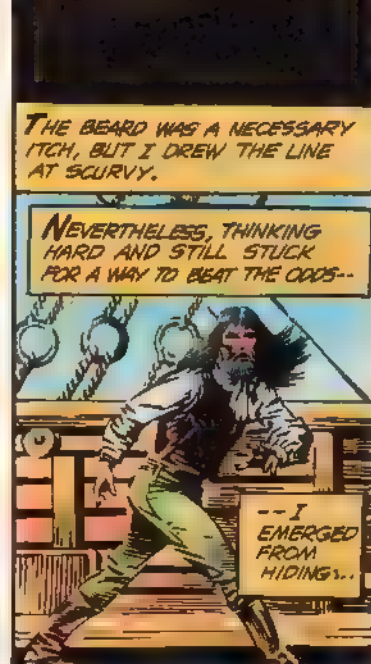
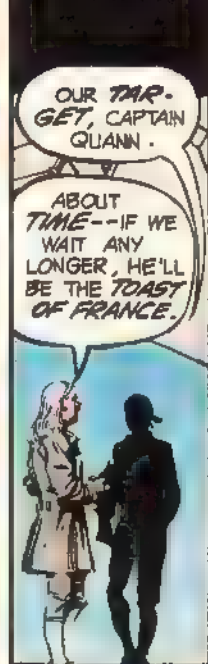
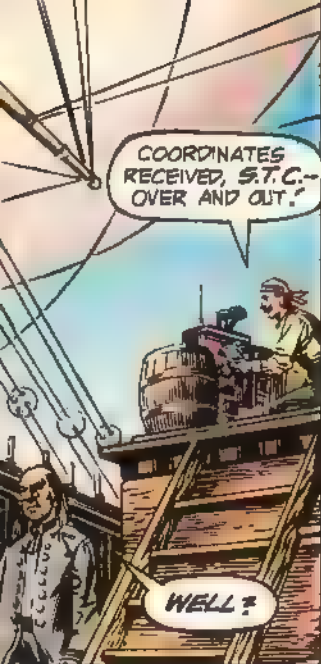
A close-up of a man's face. He is looking slightly to the side with a questioning expression.

BEND DOWN CLOSER...

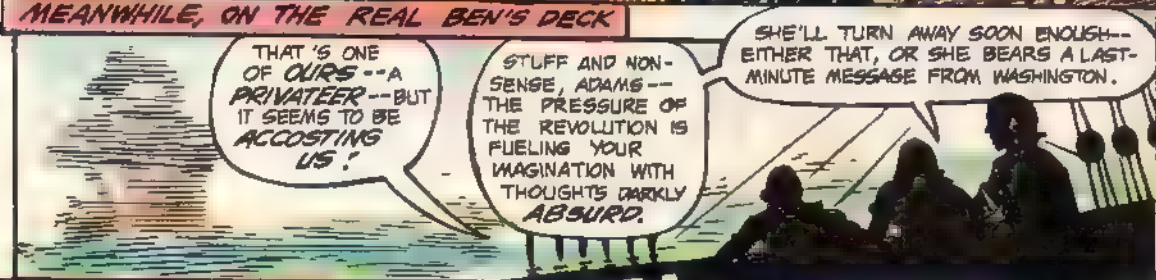
HEH HEH.

Amelia Earhart and a man are shown in a close embrace, looking at each other. The man is wearing a dark jacket. The background is dark.

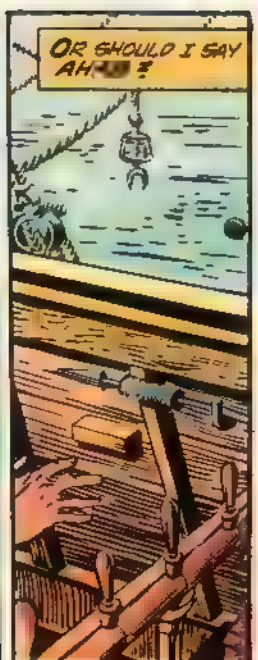




MEANWHILE, ON THE REAL BEN'S DECK



A GLITCH IN TIME...





IT WAS
CRUCIAL THAT
I'D MERELY
WOUNDED AND
NOT KILLED IT...

... ANGERED
IT, ATTRACTED
ITS ATTENTION...

... RELYING,
IN FACT, ON
VIOLENCE.

CHALK ONE UP FOR
OUR SIDE--AND
LEAVE IT TO ME
TO PRESERVE
HISTORY'S INTEG-
RITY BY AGGRA-
VATING PARADOX.

BORN IN THE RENTS
OF TIME'S SHREDD-
ING FABRIC, IT
LACED INTO
THE SHIP
LIKE A
VITATION
OF EVIL...

... AS IF ITS VERY
LIFE INIMICALLY
DEPENDENT ON
IT.

YAAHHHHH

BATRACHIAN
TENTACLES
LASHED BOW,
MAINMAST, AND
STERN, HALTING
US DEAD IN
THE WATER.

YOU SEE, MR.
ADAMS - IT WAS
JUST THE FOO--
NOW THAT SHE'S
SEEN US, SHE'S
HELD UP WELL BE-
FORE INTERCEPTION
OF OUR COURSE.

GOD KNOWS
NOW--HER SAILS
ARE STILL SET
FULL.

INSTEAD OF
TROUBLING YOUR MIND,
JOHN, THINK ON ALL
THE FRENCH GRAPE
WE'LL SOON HARVEST.

BYE, BEN--
HAVE FUN.

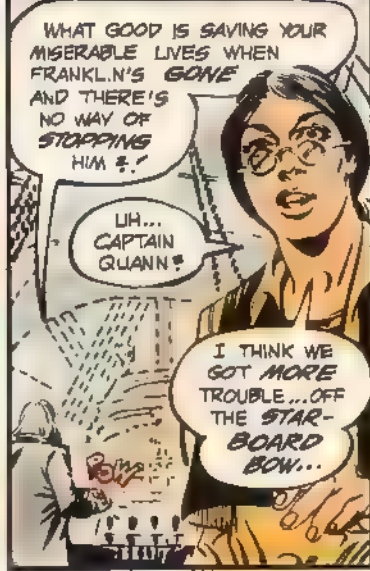
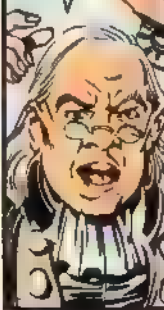
GET THE DAMNED
THING OFF US --
FRANKLIN'S
GETTING PAST!



I HUNG BACK AND WATCHED THEM DO MY USUAL WORK OF SLAYING THE DOXIE-GLITCH...

...AND I RELISHED QUANN'S RAGE TO THE HILT.

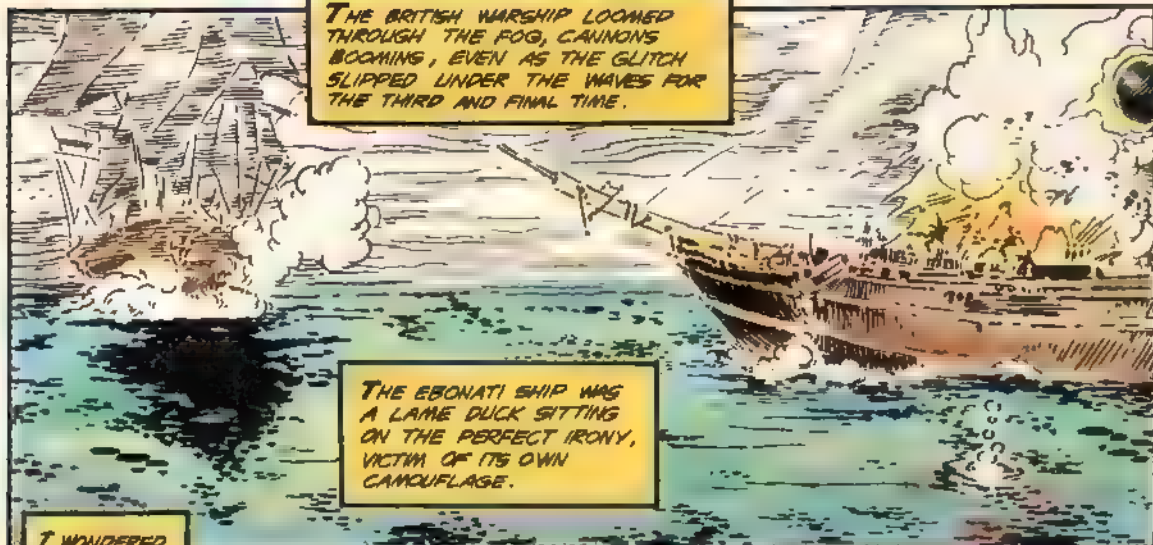
THE MAST, YOU FOOLS! WE'RE CRIPPLED!



WHAT GOOD IS SAVING YOUR MISERABLE LIVES WHEN FRANKLIN'S GONE AND THERE'S NO WAY OF STOPPING HIM?!

UH... CAPTAIN QUANN?

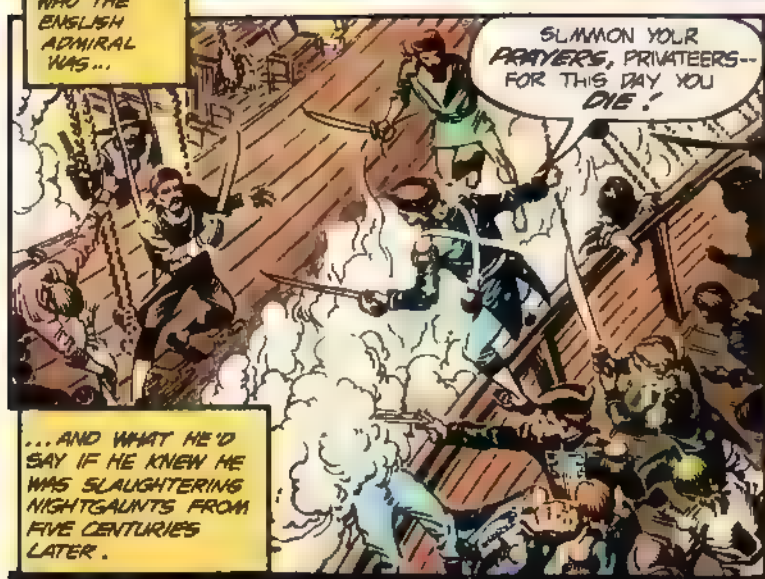
I THINK WE GOT MORE TROUBLE...OFF THE STAR-BOARD BOW...



THE BRITISH WARSHIP LOOMED THROUGH THE FOG, CANNONS BOOMING, EVEN AS THE GLITCH SLIPPED UNDER THE WAVES FOR THE THIRD AND FINAL TIME.

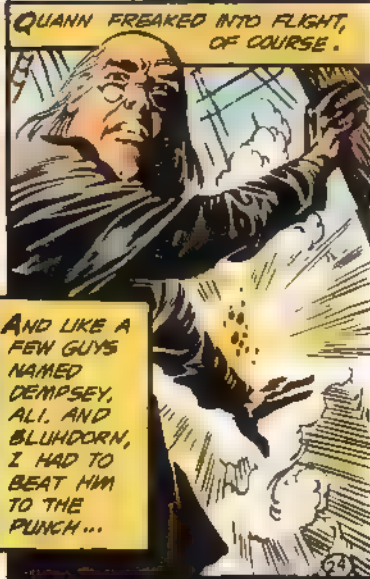
THE EBONATI SHIP WAS A LAME DUCK SITTING ON THE PERFECT IRONY, VICTIM OF ITS OWN CAMOUFLAGE.

I WONDERED WHO THE ENGLISH ADMIRAL WAS...



SLAMMON YOUR PRAYERS, PRIVATEERS-- FOR THIS DAY YOU DIE!

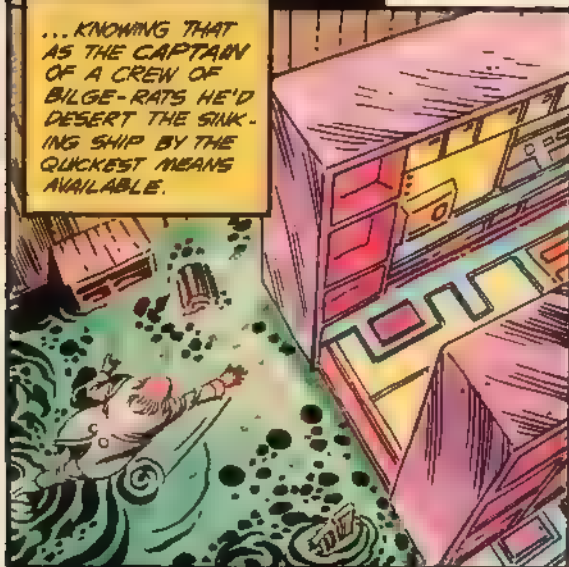
...AND WHAT HE'D SAY IF HE KNEW HE WAS SLAUGHTERING NIGHTGAUNTS FROM FIVE CENTURIES LATER.



QUANN FREAKED INTO FLIGHT, OF COURSE.

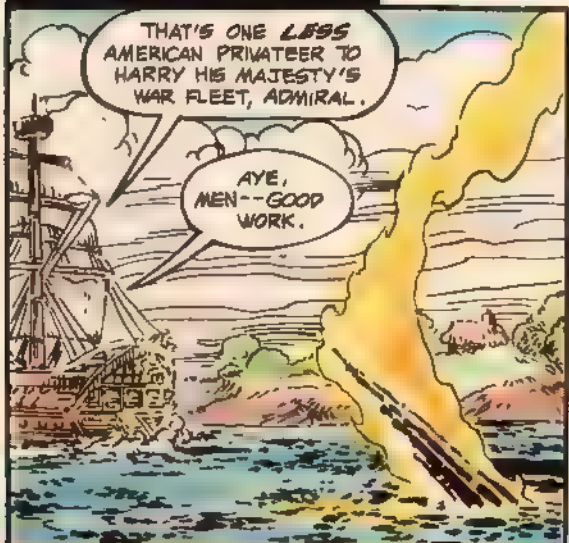
AND LIKE A FEW GUYS NAMED DEMPSEY, ALI, AND BLUNDORN, I HAD TO BEAT HIM TO THE PUNCH...

...KNOWING THAT AS THE CAPTAIN OF A CREW OF BILGE-RATS HE'D DESERT THE SINKING SHIP BY THE QUICKEST MEANS AVAILABLE.



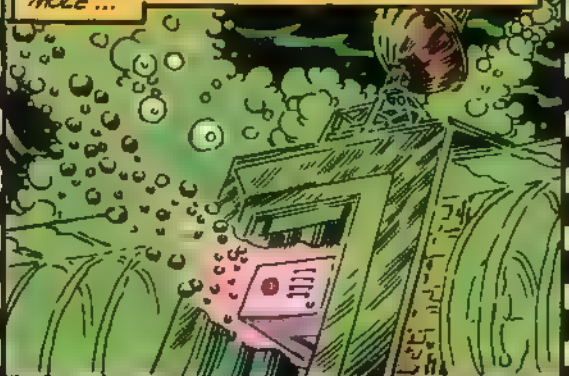
THAT'S ONE LESS AMERICAN PRIVATEER TO HARRY HIS MAJESTY'S WAR FLEET, ADMIRAL.

AYE, MEN--GOOD WORK.

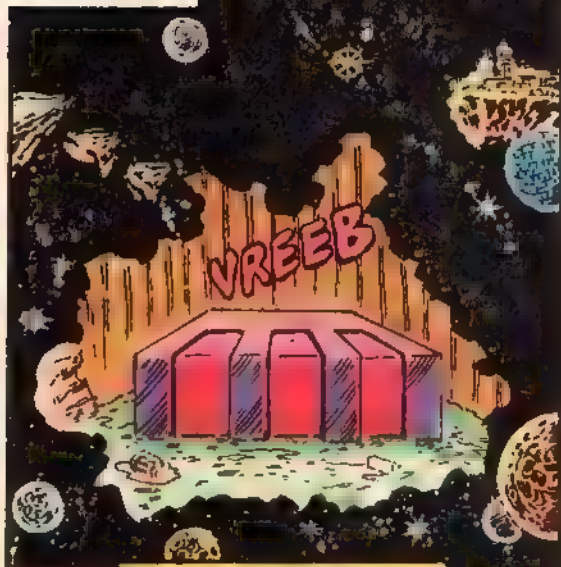


NINE-CROCODILE'S SHADOW-KNIGHTS HAD ERECTED A SOPHISTICATED SUBSEA BASE ALL FOR THE SOLE PURPOSE OF PREVENTING FRANKLIN FROM REACHING FRANCE.

I WONDERED WHAT WOULD HAVE HAPPENED HAD THEY SUCCEEDED IN ASSASSINATING THE REAL MAN AND PLANTING THEIR LOOKALIKE MOLE...

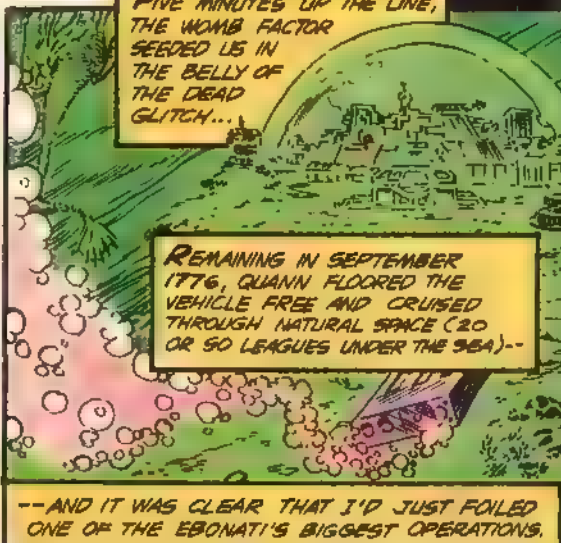


VREEB



FIVE MINUTES UP THE LINE, THE WOMB FACTOR SEEDLED US IN THE BELLY OF THE DEAD GLITCH...

REMAINING IN SEPTEMBER 1776, QUANN FLOORED THE VEHICLE FREE AND CRUISED THROUGH NATURAL SPACE (20 OR SO LEAGUES UNDER THE SEA)--

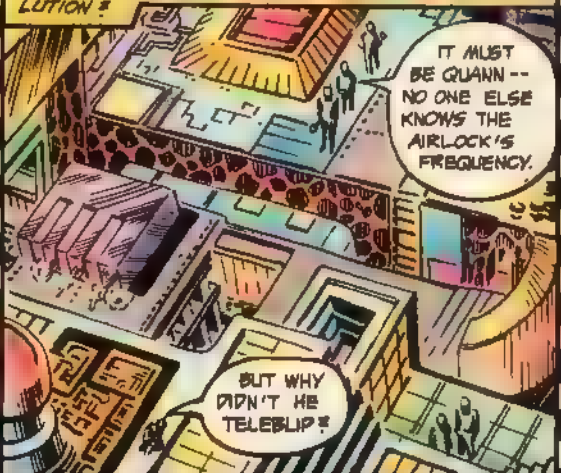


--AND IT WAS CLEAR THAT I'D JUST FOILED ONE OF THE EBONATI'S BIGGEST OPERATIONS.

WOULD HISTORY THEN REMEMBER OLD BEN AS THE IDIOT WHO SPIT IN THE FACE OF LOUIS XVI, THEREBY SCRUBBING ALL HOPES FOR FRENCH AID AND ENSURING AMERICA'S DEFEAT IN THE REVOLUTION?

IT MUST BE QUANN-- NO ONE ELSE KNOWS THE AIRLOCK'S FREQUENCY.

BUT WHY DIDN'T HE TELESLIP?



WOULD JEFFERSON, ADAMS, HANCOCK, AND ALL THE OTHERS WHO'D SET QUILL TO A DREAM OF INDEPENDENCE MOUNT THE GALLIOWS OF A COLONY PERMANENTLY UNDER THE THUMB OF THE BRITISH MONARCH?

WHAT HAPPENED, GLANN? WHAT WENT WRONG?

WHATEVER THE EBONATI INTENTIONS, THEY WERE BIG.

THE BASE WAS A PIECE OF WORK--AND EVEN THOUGH, IN ONE SENSE, IT WAS UNDOUBTEDLY CONSTRUCTED IN THE TWINKLING OF AN EYE...

GLANN--?

GLANN: "YOU'RE ALL RIGHT." BUT WHY DIDN'T YOU ANSWER--

IT MAY SOUND LIKE HISSING, BUT EVEN EBONATI CAN GASP.

...KROK'S AGENTS DO NOT GO TO THAT KIND OF TROUBLE WITHOUT THE PROMISE OF A BIG PAYDAY SPARKING THE TWINKLE.

LASERS, PAR-BEAM PISTOLS, DARKRODS.

THEY FIRED DYNAMITE, EVERY ONE OF THEM...

...AND I HAD ONLY A SINGLE BALL-SHOT.

THEY FIGURED I WAS DYING AND THAT MY SINGLE PATHETIC SHOT WAS BADLY MISFIRED.

THEY WERE AT LEAST HALF-WRONGS.

I WAS SEVERELY WOUNDED, YES...

...BUT IF I DIE, IT IS WITH THE KNOWLEDGE THAT I HIT EXACTLY WHAT I WAS AIMING AT...

...AS DIFFICULT TO
MISS AS THE BROAD
SIDE OF AN 18TH
CENTURY BARN:

THE INNER
SURFACE OF
THE DOME.

I SLIPPED INTO THE MELD IN MY
SECOND STOLEN VEHICLE, HERE TO MEND
OR DIE... AND AS MY VISION DIMMED, TWO
BLURRY IMAGES OVERLAPPED, VYING FOR
CLARITY...

ONE WAS BRIDGET...
AND THE OTHER WAS
THE OTHER WOMAN

CHILDLESS
BRIDGET WON.

TIME OUT 6: STRANDED TILL SPRINGTIME?

SO HOW WENT
THE SCAVENGER
HUNT, MY DELICATE
SNOWFLAKE ?

THE
SCAVENGER
FROZE.

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN DIED
ON THE 17TH OF APRIL
1790. HIS WHIRLWIND OF
ACCOMPLISHMENT HALTED
AFTER 84 YEARS.

DEEP IN THE VOID OF THE MILD, I FEEL CLOSE
TO HIM, TOO CLOSE... AND I RECALL THE SPANISH
POEM ILLUSTRATED BY BOA, ESPECIALLY ITS
HAUNTING FINAL LINE: "DEATH PLANTED EGGS
IN THE WOUND; AT FIVE O'CLOCK IN THE AFTER-
NOON."

AND IF THIS IS
NO BULLFIGHT,
THEN IT MUST
BE REVENGE.

BEN HOSTED THE MOST
IMPRESSIVE FUNERAL PHIL-
ADELPHIA HAD EVER SEEN,
BUT IT WAS THE FRENCH WHO
BEST EULOGIZED HIM, WITH
AN EPIGRAM FROM TURGOT.

AT 5:23 OF AN AFTERNOON
WHICH CANNOT EXIST IN THE
GOLDEN MILD, ONE OF TWO
THINGS HAS BEEN PLANTED IN
MY WOUNDS...

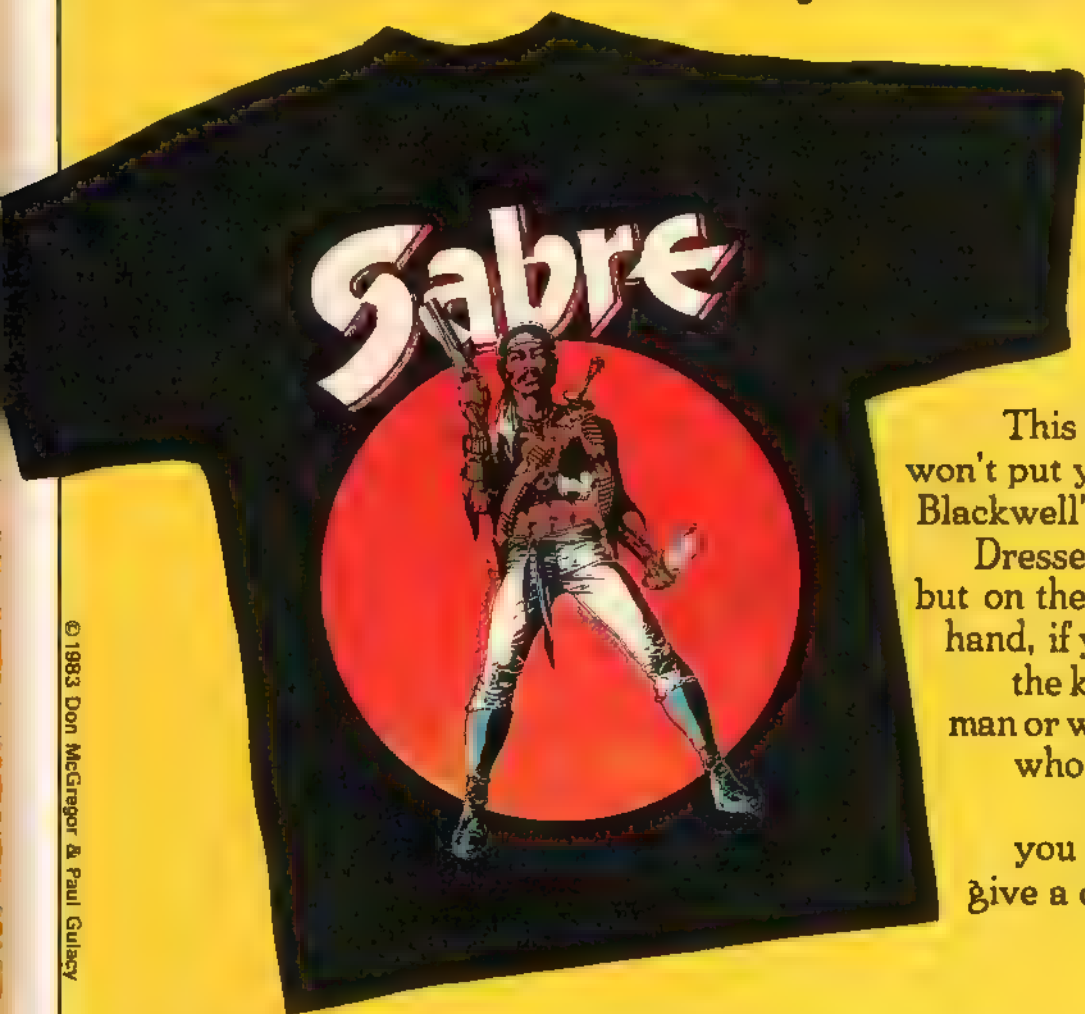
AND AS THE TWO HAZE-
SOFTENED WOMEN
MERGE INTO THE SINGLE
CRYSTALLINE FORM OF
DEATH IN ALL HER DARK
BEAUTY, I REMEMBER
THE WORDS...

" HE SNATCHED LIGHTNING
FROM THE SKIES AND
THE SCEPTRE FROM
TYRANTS. " -- TURGOT

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN
JANUARY 6, 1706
APRIL 17, 1790

THE
END

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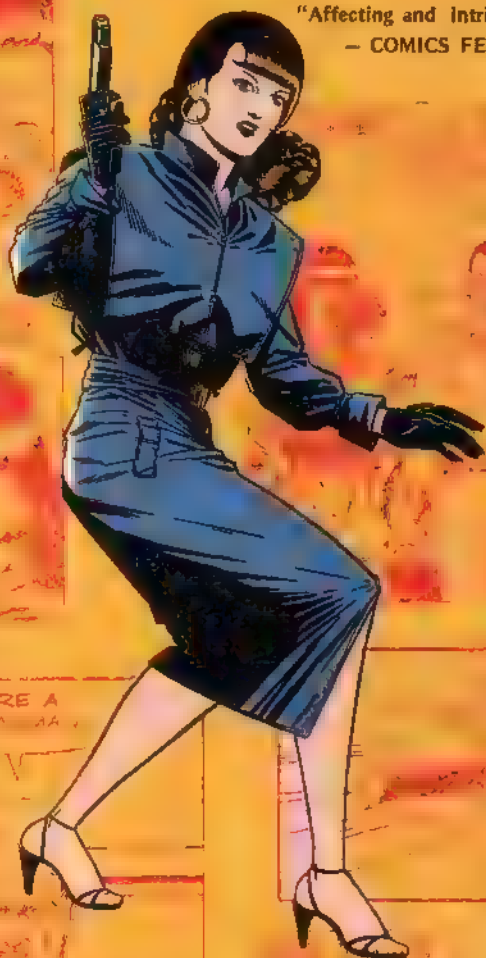
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— COMICS BUYER'S GUIDE

Notes from SURF CITY

by Jan & Dean Mullaney

Thank You One and All:

The past few months have been the most successful in Eclipse's history and we have many people to thank . . . first and foremost, here's a tip of the ol' Eclipse hat to all the great writers, artists, letterers and colorists who've made the books bearing the Eclipse colophon so acclaimed. Secondly, if it weren't for the fine store owners and distributors who take the comics from us and offer them to you, we'd be in a fine mess indeed!

But, in this column, we save our major thanks for you, the Eclipse supporters who have, over the years, helped us turn an initial \$2,000 investment and a dream into a reality. We began publishing comics in 1978 because we weren't satisfied with the comics then being produced. Nor were we happy with the cheap, throwaway format then (and still!) used for comics. Nor did we feel it correct for the major publishers to "grab it all, drain it all and own it all." We believed then, as we do today, that if comics are to progress as a creative medium, and not become the creative wasteland that, for example, television is, then the creators must be heeded, respected and treated as equal partners.

At any rate, it's been a long and winding road since we published the first graphic album for the direct sales market and established a royalty system back in 1978. The market has grown, we've grown, and the incentive, both creative and financial, is there to keep the top talents in comics.

So where does that leave Eclipse in 1984, you wonder? We will, first and foremost, continue to broaden the horizons and publish the widest variety of any comics company extant. Our line will virtually double in size by the end of the year, and we'd like to take this time to clue you in on a few new series.

ZOT! will be at your local comics shop as you read this. This is an exciting new monthly series written, pencilled and inked by a talent whom we believe is going to take his place among the true greats in the field. Scott McCloud may only be 23 years old with his first comic book out this month, but watch out, world! This guy's a triple-threat who packs more punch, characterization and charm in this one series than many people do in a lifetime!



ZOT! records the exploits of a 13-year old superhero from an alternate Earth. He's the only superhero on his world and yet, because he's underage, his butler/robot named Peabody must drive him around in his zoom car

when Zot's not flying on his own accord! The first issue starts off with Zot crashing through the dimensional barrier between his Earth and ours, chased by killer robots sent on a zealous religious crusade! His mission? To recover the stolen Key to the Door at the Edge of the Universe! Along the way he meets Jenny Weaver, a girl from our Earth and . . . well, you'll just have to look for the bright yellow ZOT! logo at the same store where you bought this comic in order to get in on the fun yourself!

Another comic that should still be on the stands is the first issue of AZTEC ACE, already hailed in previews as one of the most original time travel series ever written! It's a beautifully rendered, and fully painted double-sized first issue by Doug Moench, Michael Hernandez, Nestor Redondo and Denis McFarling. If you haven't picked it up yet, open up the first issue to any page. We'll bet you'll like what you see so much that you'll be home reading it before we can say "Quetzalcoatl!" three times fast!

And while you're checking out the new releases, don't forget to look for STAR*REACH CLASSICS no. 1 with 30 pages of Jim Starlin, Neal Adams, Frank Cirocco and Dave Sim. If great comics art is your thing, you won't find many single issues to beat this one.

As most of you know, Mark Evanier and Will Meugniot's DNAGENTS is one of the most popular of all direct-only comics. It also gets more mail than any other Eclipse book, and much of that mail asks (some of you even demand) more of the DNAGENTS universe. To be honest about it, we could have cashed in on this book's success early on and given you a quickly put together companion book or mini-series, but we didn't. We didn't because making a quick buck isn't as important to us as giving you just the right comic with just the right story and just the right writer and artist.

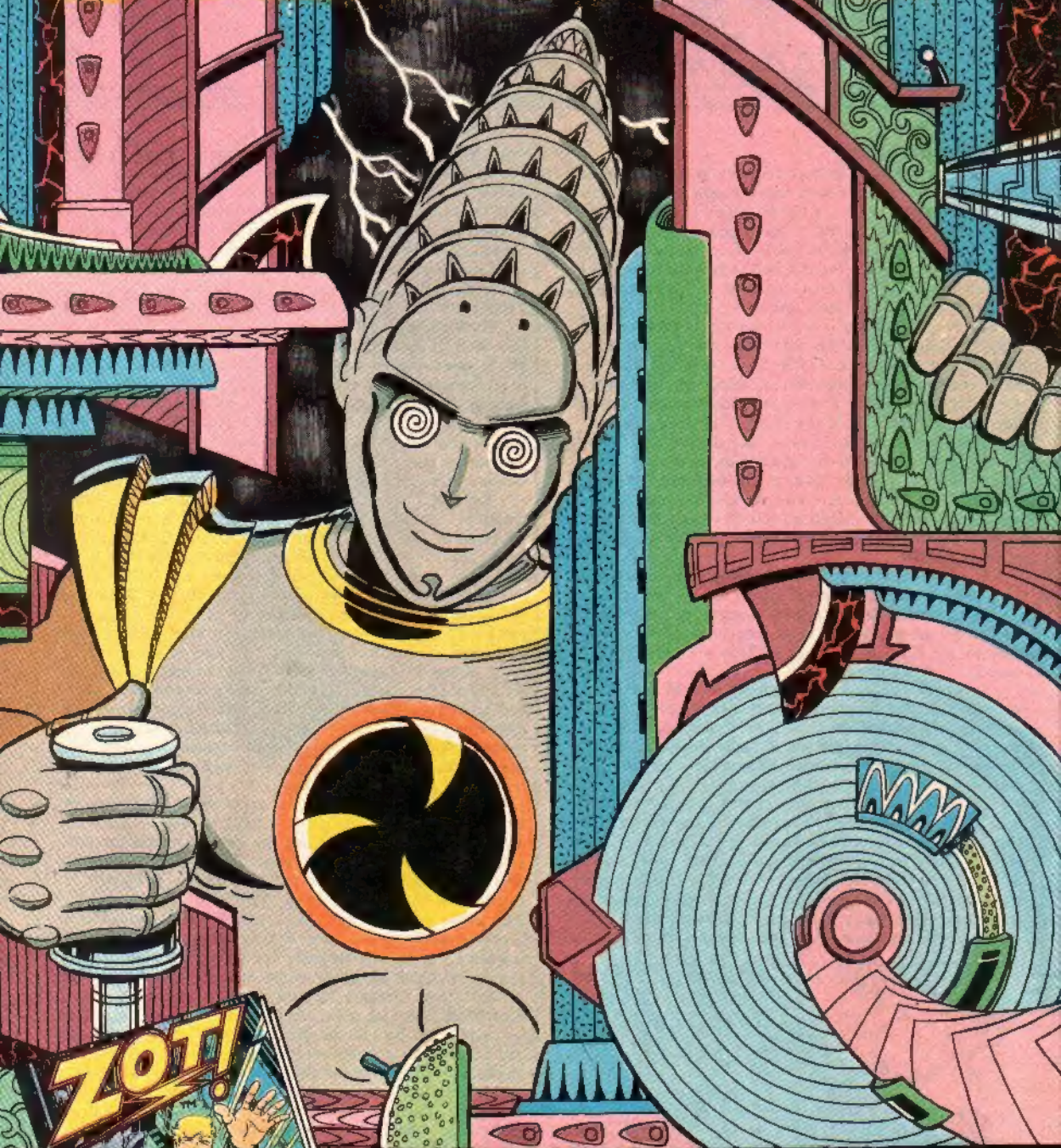
Finding the right writer was no problem. Mark Evanier would probably kill anyone who tried to take a DNAGENTS script away from him. Finding the right character for the companion book was a little more difficult. Of all the characters introduced in the first year of the DNAGENTS, one seemed to stand out from the others. . . Crossfire! And so we sat down with Mark and Will and decided that Crossfire would be our boy. But something happens to the original Crossfire in DNAGENTS no. 10 on sale now, a something which we knew would happen months ago. We needed a new Crossfire for our series, and when you see what Mark came up with, we think you'll be as excited as we were when he told us! We don't want to say too much, but if you take a writer who's scripted over 200 television shows and knows the ins and outs of Hollywood's gossip, and let him use that as a backdrop for a new superhero series, you might get the idea of what the crusading Hollywood crimefighter will be about.

Finding an artist who could draw such a series was the most difficult part. It would have to be someone who could capture the same realistic Hollywood scene as Mark's stories. There was only one choice for the assignment as far as all of us were concerned. Who else has been based in California so many years and knows as many ins and outs as does Mark? None other than Blackhawk artist Dan Spiggle. And so the book was set.

CROSSFIRE no. 1 will be at your comics shop in April, arriving a week after DNAGENTS no. 11.

And that's all the room we have this month. Thanks, as always, for your support!

BIZARRE



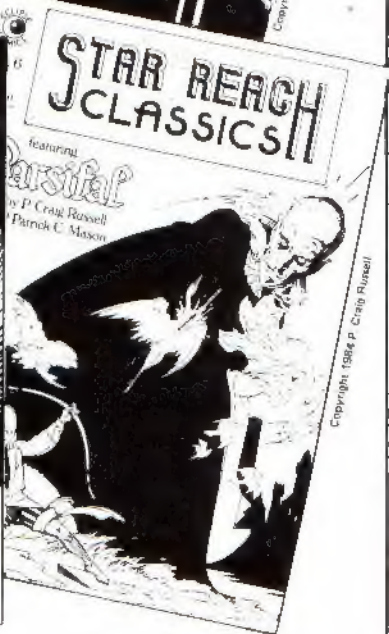
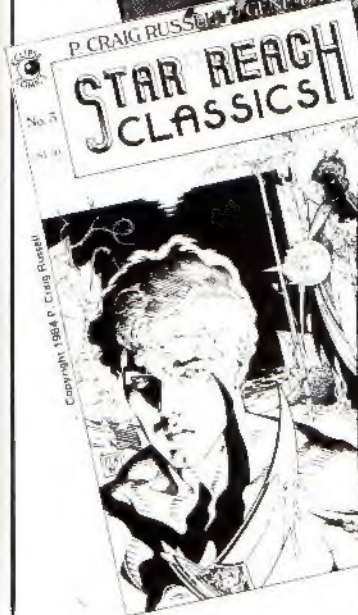
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a three-part story beginning in ECLIPSE MONTHLY no.6